

Meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** of the Teesdale District
Council held at Teesdale House, Galgate, Barnard Castle on
WEDNESDAY 19 DECEMBER 2007 at 10:00 am

PRESENT:

District Council Representatives:

Councillors RA Bell, K Coates, DH Reed, JM Salter

Independent Members:

Mr J Hughes (Chairman), Mrs D Austin (part of meeting)

Apologies for absence: Councillors PM Charlton, MJ Clark and MWL Hamilton

Officers in Attendance: M Dennis (Chief Governance Officer - Monitoring Officer) and D Harris (Democratic Services Assistant)

Also in Attendance: Mr T Lewis, applicant for the vacant position of independent representative and Cllr J Blissett (Barnard Castle Town Council), applicant for one of the two vacant positions of Parish Council representative.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Lewis and Cllr Blissett to the meeting, noting that their appointments to the Standards Committee would require Council approval. Mr Lewis and Cllr Blissett gave brief personal introductions.

14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members.

15 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 26 September 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16 REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER

The Chief Governance Officer (Monitoring Officer) presented an update report for consideration by members.

(A) Membership Update

In response to a newspaper advertisement, Mr Trevor Lewis had applied for the vacant position of independent member and Barnard Castle Town Council had nominated Cllr John Blissett for one of the two vacant positions of Town/Parish Council representative. Both were in attendance today to witness the work of the committee. Members were reminded that both appointments would require formal approval by the Council (next scheduled meeting 27 February 2008).

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the appointment of Mr T Lewis as an independent member of the Standards Committee be submitted for approval to the next meeting of Full Council.
- (2) That the appointment of Cllr J Blissett as a Parish Council member of the Standards Committee be submitted for approval to the next meeting of Full Council.

(B) Standards Board Bulletin No 36 (December 2007)

The latest Bulletin had been circulated to members. Items of particular interest were discussed, as follows:

Management of complaints: Draft regulations were being prepared, to require that, from April 2008, all alleged breaches would be referred locally via the Monitoring Officer for the committee to assess.

Standards Board Local Assessment Pilot: Noted the expectation that, in the early stages, committees would feel that more of the complaints received would require consideration, mirroring the early experience of the Standards Board. The role of Monitoring Officer would not be to submit complaints, but to deal with complaints which arise. Noted the need for the Standards Committee to be large enough for a 50/50 split to separate assessment from investigation. There is currently one vacancy for a Town/Parish member.

Checklist for implementation: Lengthy discussion on this item covering: role of the Monitoring Officer as impartial advisor and source of assistance, also to advise members who have a complaint made against them. After April 2008, the Monitoring Officer will reply to complainant. The Standards Board will gather statistics on how committees are working locally and can remove the right to local determination. Local guidance will be available in January 2008 and will be circulated to members.

Case reviews: To be used as training – to be undertaken at the next meeting.

Ethical governance self assessment: Developed by the Audit Commission in conjunction with the Standards Board and Improvement and Development Agency. Recently undertaken by the District Council. A report will be brought to the next meeting.

Restriction on political activities: Local Standards Committees are to take over the role currently performed by the independent adjudicator. Guidance on this matter was expected.

(C) Local Government Structures

A new unitary authority will come into being in April 2009, when the existing Teesdale District Council functions will cease. In the meantime, there is likely to be cross-fertilisation of experience and ideas (across the County) and it is anticipated that Standards Committees with light workloads might offer assistance to those with heavier demands. Monitoring Officers plan to undertake a joint report to ensure that all are operating to the same standards and interpretation of regulations (e.g. the forthcoming regulations on local management of complaints).

(D) Equalities Workshops

Arrangements had now been made for training sessions on the updated equalities/standards requirements:

16 January 10:00 am Enterprise House

22 January 5:00 pm Council Chamber, Teesdale House

Feedback session:

30 January 4:15 pm Council Chamber, Teesdale House

(E) Dealing with Complaints: Local assessment process

The assessment process was noted and mechanisms for ensuring impartiality were discussed.

17 MATTERS RAISED BY MEMBERS

No matters were raised.

18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

2 April 2008. An earlier meeting may be necessary to consider the local management of complaints regulations.

The meeting closed at 11:25 am.

DH/MD 9 January 2008